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## IN SEARCH OF TRUE BEINGS.

IF I MEET a philosopher for the first time and wish to learn at once what kind of a philosopher he is, I ask him frankly: What do you think really exists? If he answers sincerely, he can give only one of two answers. At least, I have met only two answers to this question worth mentioning. The *individualist* says: “I do most really exist, and besides me other beings like myself.” The *universalist* answers: “Only the *whole* does really exist, and I am but a manifestation of being.” The universalist is the most diversified species of the two. He appears as an idealist in Plato and Hegel, as a materialist in Democritus and Epicurus, as a pantheist in Spinoza, as a pessimist in Schopenhauer, as a socialist in the modern society. He feels himself always dependent on something else, on ideas, atoms, God, society; he never admits that he is himself a true independent being. In politics he advocates the omnipotence of the State, in economics the monopoly of production, in religion obedience to general laws fixed once forever, obliging every individual to give up his individuality; in psychology he denies free will, and if he chooses to be consistent he never admits personal immortality. This universalism is so strong by its secular tradition that individualism has frequently lost its best advocates through universalist suggestion.

Descartes, who began with individualism, ended in acknowledging a “*concursus Dei*” in each act of our soul. Leibnitz also could not get over the difficulty of interaction without *harmonie pré-établie*. The whole history of philosophy is full of such contradictions between the individual’s independence and God’s omnipotence. Then there are radical individualists, who bring individualism

into discredit by staining it with boundless egoism, as for instance *Nietzsche*, who thought his own true existence incompatible with the existence of others, and is gone mad in the struggle for infinite self-assertion.

There is one nation on earth which has given a very strong expression to individualism and to the recognition of the rights of a minority. The Poles, while they were independent, thought that if a law was not unanimously accepted by all, if it seemed wrong only to one of them, it ought not to be recognised as law in a free nation. According to this conception of freedom they framed a constitution unique in history, in which the veto of each member of Parliament was alone sufficient for suspending indefinitely the decisions of all the others. Unanimity was the condition of every decision which was to be obligatory for all. This strange and elsewhere unknown recognition of a minority of one, led Poland to anarchy and to the loss of political independence, but it remains for the whole of mankind an ideal realisation of individualism.

This explains why individualism nowhere found more typical representatives than among the Poles. The Polish poet Mickiewicz says in one of his greatest works to the Christian God :

" My strength came thence, whence thou hast taken thine, nor do I fear to lose it."

How difficult it is for universalists and individualists to understand each other, I had many opportunities to see, but never so fully as when I met at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago with an overwhelming majority of universalists from all parts of the world. They asked me what was my faith, and I could not answer by some well-known name, because I had never met with an adequate expression of my Polish individualism in the works of foreign philosophers. Remembering those questions of my friends, the universalists, with whom I had infinite discussions two years ago in Chicago, I shall try now to state in a short and clear way what is the teaching of our Polish fraternity, a church without holy books or authorities, but with the strongest faith on earth.

I do not recognise any power nor any form of being above the individual, nor do I *know* anything about an almighty, omniscient,

perfect Being. The being I know best is myself—then other human beings.

I know also that I have the power to influence other beings, and that I am influenced sometimes by others. Some of my actions are, so far as I am conscious of, not caused by myself, and as I do not admit unconscious causation, such actions must be caused by some beings outside, if not by living men, then by invisible spirits, one of whom may be called God, if we suppose him more powerful than the others, without any necessity to recognise his omnipotence.

Such an idea of God as a being like myself is entirely different from the traditional notions of an almighty Creator. Still my true position respecting the Divinity is more a suspension of judgment than a frank denial. I have never met God, nor have I known him as a distinct personality. I leave it open whether he exists, though I am inclined to doubt about his being my Creator.

I think I cannot have been created at all, because creation implies a beginning in time, and time is only in my thoughts. True beings like myself are independent of time, because the existence of time itself is conditioned by their existence.

Time and space are within me ; I could not be a true being if I were like matter in time and space. Other beings, in so far as represented by me, are phenomena, and seem to be in time and space. I can look at myself in my relation to others as to a phenomenon in time and space, but for myself I am a real substance, outside time and space.

I do not deny succession of states in myself, but succession is not the same thing as time. There is no reason why a simple state of my mind should last any length of time. No state of mind, no psychical act requires time to be completed. Only physical movements occur in time. Psychical movement goes on without friction. In less than a second I can psychically live a life ; a century of human chronology may be for my mind a single thought.

My life is a succession of events, and is not determined in advance, because I recognise my *free will* as the chief factor of my acts, and I am conscious of my faculty of choice at every point of my life.

I am sure to have a perfect knowledge of my persistence after death, and I think that people who speak about immortality without feeling themselves uncreated are in contradiction with themselves. Anything that had a beginning must have an end : it is not given to an ephemeral creature to be immortal. If I feel myself immortal, it is not because some God made me such, but because if I were not immortal, I could not be a true being at all. The mere fact of my being implies my eternal being, because anything that can be destroyed, has only an apparent existence, due to something else indestructible.

As the naturalist imagines everything built of atoms and thinks those atoms to be the true components of each material appearance, a metaphysician reduces the atom itself to its true cause, the conscious monad, able to represent atoms in her mind and to frame space and time for the movements of those imagined atoms.

Many times I have discussed my existence with different adherents of universalism, materialists, idealists, pessimists, socialists, pantheists. At last I came to the conclusion that they might be right for themselves and wrong as to my existence and the existence of other true beings. They say they are only manifestations of something else : atoms, ideas, God, society, the universe. Perhaps they are such manifestations of a being unknown to me, but I know myself to be a true being, the most certain being I know of. I let them be what they pretend to be, and expect sometime to make the personal acquaintance of that mysterious being, their master. But I defy him to become my own master : I shall resist his power like Shelley's Prometheus did that of the old Jupiter, "with a calm fixed mind." I do not hate him, nay, I look at him as my friend, because we have to a great extent the same aims and also many common enemies.

The servants of that mysterious being, called God, say that they love mankind, and that they do so by his order. I love mankind, truth, beauty, not because it is God's will, but only because it is my own free pleasure. I act according to my ideas of duty, not imposed by any other being but by my own considerations of the results of my action.

I am confident, that those aims, which are the aims of my will, can become the common aims of all beings, and that makes their power.

As to the mystery of interaction between the beings, of my partial influence on others and the influence of others on me, I prefer frankly to confess that I have no explanation for it. The hypothesis of a *concursus Dei* or *harmonie préétablie* seems to me no explanation at all. It is useless to explain a common experience by some very uncommon and obscure hypothesis. The whole problem of mutual influence, as it is contained in the smallest movement of my body, remains entirely the same in the supposed action of God on men.

If Descartes or Leibnitz understood how God could create or act, I think they could understand in the same way their own action on others. But they seemed not to be quite sure of their own existence, and thought that God's existence and action was easier to understand. They were parts, manifestations, or servants of their God—I am my own Lord. I do not deny the power of their Master. He may act on millions and millions of his servants, sometimes on myself, but I know he does not *always* act on me, I *can resist* his actions if I wish. This certainly leads me to the indisputable knowledge of my true immortality—not the vague immortality of universalists, but a living immortality,<sup>1</sup> a true eternal continuation of myself, with everything that makes up my personality: memory, affections, the same aims and increased power.

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<sup>1</sup>On the subject of immortality see my article in the April number, 1895, of *The International Journal of Ethics*, and another in the December number, 1893 of *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, being the publications of a lecture held in Chicago during the World's Fair.